

Invasive Plants and the 2007 Farm Bill

~ Recommendations ~

Elevate invasive plant management as a critical conservation concern in the 2007 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act (Farm Bill). Invasive plants can change soil properties and reduce soil stability and productivity, alter natural hydrologic regimes, degrade wildlife and migratory bird habitat, degrade wetlands, and alter fire regimes.

Prioritize funding for USDA conservationists and technical advisors working with invasive plants and require comprehensive training of technical service providers who may be consulted regarding invasive plants, site- and ecosystem-appropriate vegetation, and management strategies.

Prioritize prevention and early detection of invasive plants. Invasive plant prevention is more cost-effective, efficient, and successful than management of invaded habitats.

Make maintenance and restoration of biodiversity an explicit program objective. Diverse plant communities are more stable, more consistently productive, and, in concept, may sequester more carbon due to diverse lifeforms.

Prohibit using invasive plants for biofuel production on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands and elsewhere to avoid spreading invasive plants. Furthermore, plants considered for biofuels production should be screened for invasive traits.

Allow haying, mowing, burning, and grazing to manage invasive plants. All actions should be NRCS-approved and strategically timed to manage wildlife habitat, allow reproduction of native birds and other wildlife, remove decadent vegetation, and provide other ecological benefits.

Expand program eligibility to include non-producers. Invasive plants on non-agricultural lands can threaten the productivity of agricultural lands and the integrity of wildlife habitat.

Provide increased incentives for long-term, multi-stakeholder efforts to prevent or manage invasive plants at multiple spatial scales. Cooperative weed management engages more people and is more sustainable than single-landowner and single-stakeholder efforts.

Invasive plants should be explicitly excluded from definitions of “appropriate vegetative cover.” Define “appropriate vegetative cover” as species deemed appropriate by NRCS Ecological Site Descriptions.

Require monitoring of land-condition indicators and management effects to provide a basis for management adaptations and program accountability. Long-term data are essential to evaluate program effectiveness and determine future strategies.

Background

Non-federal agricultural and forested lands represent approximately 1.4 billion acres in the contiguous United States. The conservation programs of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) committed extensive resources to conservation on these private lands. Since its inception, the Farm Bill has continued to evolve from a program focused on protecting eroding cropland and reducing overproduction of major crops to emphasizing conservation and environmental improvements. Key benefits include conservation of soil, wetlands, wildlife habitat, water quantity, and water and air quality. However, new issues that impact the ecosystem services of farmlands and ranchlands enrolled in these programs continue to emerge. One of the most pressing issues in the 21st century is the impact of invasive plants*.

In 2005-2006, Farm Bill Forums were held to solicit public input on the formulation of the 2007 Farm Bill. Invasive plant management was identified as a key issue for future programs. Invasive plants may affect conservation programs in numerous ways. It is critical that science-based recommendations addressing invasive plants be compiled, given the potential impacts of invasive plants on the ecosystem services that Farm Bill conservation programs are intended to provide.

The Center for Invasive Plant Management (CIPM) organized and sponsored a workshop of invited scientists to provide the scientific underpinnings to inform policy for the 2007 Farm Bill Conservation Title concerning the management of invasive plants. The workshop was held March 20-21, 2007, at Montana State University-Bozeman. Participants considered impacts on wildlife, water quality, water quantity, production (agriculture, grazing, and forestry), and wetlands. They assessed the state of the science relevant to conservation programs, considered implications for future management, and developed science-based recommendations. Participants (and their expertise) were:

- **Dr. Sara Baer**, Southern Illinois University (grasslands, soils, ecology)
- **Dr. Terrance Bidwell**, Oklahoma State University (wildlife, forests, grasslands, extension)
- **Dr. David Engle**, Iowa State University (rangeland ecology, grazing and fire, grasslands, grassland birds)
- **Dr. Johannes Knops**, University of Nebraska (plant and ecosystem ecology)
- **Dr. Kenneth Langeland**, University of Florida (aquatic and upland vegetation management, management technologies, plant pest ecology)
- **Dr. Bruce Maxwell**, Montana State University (crop-weed competition, plant population and ecosystem dynamics)
- **Dr. Fabian Menalled**, Montana State University (plant community dynamics, cropping systems, herbicide resistance)
- **Dr. Steve Whisenant**, Texas A&M University (ecological restoration)

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*For the purposes of this workshop, participants applied the federal definition of “invasive species” used in Presidential Executive Order 13112 (Feb. 1999) to the concept of an “invasive plant.” An “invasive species” is defined by the Executive Order as a species: 1) that is non-native to the ecosystem under consideration, and 2) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.